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EXTENSION

PRIMA-CIVITAS

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A Symposium Abstract

The Engineering Society of Detroit Institute (ESDI), Prima Civitas Foundation (PCF) and Michigan State University (MSU) have teamed to conduct a symposium titled **"The Re-Envisioning of Our Future Together"** to examine how the Township of Davison and the City of Davison can build upon their history of collaboration to ensure a sustainable social, political and economic future of the Davison community now and in the future.

Our Process

The Initiative follows the inclusive and facilitative process of ESDI that builds from long-standing model of the National Academies of Science in Washington, D.C. More about the process and findings from past symposia of is available at www.esdinstitute.net.

A key attribute of this process is that it begins using a "clean sheet" approach. We have no predetermined agenda as to outcomes for any initiative. The outcome of our symposia is the work of the attendees to generate new and exciting approaches and importantly solutions. While the issues relating to any cohesive and consensual policy may seem difficult to achieve, we are convinced from past symposia that the process in fact brings together the opportunity for unexpected results that beforehand seemed impossible.

At the onset of a symposium, we first set the stage through papers presented by experts relevant to the subject matter. Next the attendees look at an initiative without emphasis on today's obstacles through intense brainstorming. Then we assess the ideas generated and prioritize. Finally we conclude our



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FOUNDED IN 1933

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symposium with constituent responsibility and implementation action plans. Today's norm of seeking a "win-lose" scenario is outdated and not constructive. Simply put, finding fresh "win-win" answers is our goal and our job is to bring the people together to make this a reality for the good of everyone.

Stakeholders from all areas, backgrounds and viewpoints are invited to attend the symposium. Imagine the energy of thought and creativity that can be achieved when leaders from the fields of government, finance, land use, housing, roads, safety, human services, economic development, industry, labor, education, nonprofits and other professions come together with the residents of the Davison community. This diversity is critical to the success of the symposium and is the driver for critical thinking, discovery of consensual action and the successful implementation of meaningful and productive change.

By bringing together differing minds into a problem-solving and neutral forum, the potential for creative advancement is limitless and importantly can be self-implementing due to its inclusiveness. Gridlock often caused by miscommunication or distrust is overcome and common ground is achieved allowing for the implementation of systemic change on a consensual basis. Our means break through the real and perceived barriers that divide us and inhibit progress.

To accomplish its mission, the symposium will focus on the following core mega question:

"How can local governments, on a cost-effective basis, work together to improve the structure of government, delivery of services, attraction of jobs & investment and opportunities of formal and lifelong education?"

The mega question fosters an interactive environment in which participants seek first to understand the positions, interests and needs of the other. In so doing, issues viewed previously in isolation or disagreement are considered in a larger and more profound context and barriers are examined from a new and wider perspective leading to creative problem solving and lasting solutions to address current needs and advance long-term requirements. In a word, conflicts are resolved through a proactive and interactive collaboration methodology instead of confrontation and superior bargaining position.

Background Overview¹

State and local government throughout Michigan is confronted with unprecedented challenges with regard to structure, service delivery, financing, education, taxation and a host of other critical issues. At least a dozen communities are being monitored as potential sites for receivership. Services such as public safety, K-12 education and other human services have been drastically impacted as Michigan's economy continues to shrink and change.

Communities are searching for solutions to these issues and challenges. Thus far, the problems continue to grow and the solutions are not clear. In the midst of this crisis confronting communities, some local government leaders are attempting to envision new and innovative ways to organize their structure,

¹ We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Michael K. Brown, lead of the Flint Area Reinvestment Office, for his contribution in the preparation of this Abstract and in this effort.

service delivery, jobs/economic development, finance/taxation and land use, to name a few. The land use focus includes an emphasis on comprehensive planning and housing.

The City of Davison and Davison Township leadership team has reached out to start a process of exploration, visioning and comprehensive planning to address these critical issues confronting every community in Michigan. In February 2010, a public forum was attended by more than 300 local citizens. The audience included the City Council and Township Trustees from each entity. The outcome from this forum resulted in a consensus that the community as a whole should go forward with a process to explore new and innovative ways to stimulate growth, create jobs, improve service delivery and ultimately organize themselves to meet the needs of the 21st century. Hence, we are privileged to hold this symposium.

The value of our current work goes far beyond Davison. The Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Township Association, State of Michigan and a host of professional regional organizations are viewing this process with great interest. The statewide ramifications of our efforts are significant. Communities throughout Michigan need to develop practical tools to adjust to a swiftly changing environment. Many local units of government can no longer deliver municipal services such as public safety, recreation, public works and other vital operations for citizens. These challenges present a great opportunity for Professional Organizations, Higher Education, All Units of Government and Philanthropy to join together and explore new ways to organize ourselves and create new pathways to success for our state and our citizens. This last point is vital if we are to reverse the brain drain in Michigan and keep our young people in our communities working and contributing and raising their families.

Conclusion

Our goals are two-fold. First, we intend to provide practical answers that are specific to the Davison community building upon their history of working together. Second, we see this effort as an incubator to create a working model that will serve as a proactive catalyst and practical planning tool for other communities struggling with today's harsh social and economic realities. The action plan resulting from the symposium will have broad application to benefit Michigan on a state-wide basis. It also advances the mission of philanthropy in Michigan to build strong communities through sound planning practices, collaboration and broad citizen support.

Despite the unprecedented economic distress that threatens our future prosperity, we submit that this environment is our collective opportunity. The harsh realities we face make it incumbent upon us to identify and build a consensus for Michigan's local governments based upon concrete and implementable solutions that can be undertaken immediately, in the near term future and over the long term while enhancing our social, political and economic wellbeing.

This Abstract has been prepared as an informational piece. It is intended to start the process and not to limit it in any way. Our goal is to report new and achievable ideas that can be implemented to benefit all. With your support, our symposium mega question will be answered for Davison, but just as important it will create a model and practical tools for Michigan communities, helping them move forward in these times of unprecedented challenge.

